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Reclaiming the Left

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Abstract

The Left has been charged with a lack of self-reflection and self-criticism. This article aims to address this concern through a demarcation of liberal-left values from illiberal pursuits in an attempt to reclaim (or reform) the Left to provide a genuine political opposition to the Right. Drawing together diverse perspectives, and extrapolating from direct quotations and research, four markers of extremism are identified. These markers relate to ideas of equity, culture, free speech and identity. It is hoped readers see this critique as a useful contribution in a crucial conversation on the values we want to preference in our society, a conversation we need to continue.

Keywords: Heterodox Academy; Pluralism; Right and left (Political science)

Introduction

Now here's the issue. We know that things can go too far on the right, and we know that things can go too far on the left, but we don't know what the markers are for going too far on the left. And I would say that it's ethically incumbent on those who are liberal or left-leaning to identify the markers of pathological extremism on the left and to distinguish themselves from the people who hold those pathological viewpoints. And I don't see that that's being done and I think that's a colossal ethical failure.¹

The Left-Right dichotomy lends itself to proselytising over right and wrong, good and evil, beyond a 'them and us' conflict to a Manichean moral division² and with the democratisation of viewpoint via the channels of the internet, it has become a labelling system defined by its most extreme manifestations, e.g. right-wing=Nazi/left-wing=Communist. 'Thanks to the internet, a new discursive register has emerged: either you're with us, to the most extreme interpretation of our ideas, or you're against us'.³ While I am 'uncomfortable with the image of conflict rather than consensus [the dichotomy] may imply',⁴ it is common political parlance to position values using this distinction and is 'not only convenient but also meaningful'.⁵

In his paper on political mapping, Jonathan White acknowledges '[t]he political world is ineradicably complex, and no representation of it is likely to overcome this – perhaps

¹ Peterson 2018a.

² See Haidt: 2008, 2012a and 2012b.

³ Wallace 2015.

⁴ White 2010.

⁵ Rockey 2009.

certainly not one reliant on the simple yet ambiguous imagery of Left and Right'.⁶ Nonetheless, he later warns that Left and Right can be thought of as 'carriers of meaning – meaning which may be dangerous if it is not nailed with precision'.⁷ Therefore, markers for what the Left *means* are important.

In the age where we are told the centre cannot hold⁸, the left-liberal project is under threat from a cynicism towards liberalism and a more divisive politics. Liberalism is ridiculed by both left and right, with a *New York Times* piece last year castigating 'liberal' as 'the consensus, the gutless compromise position, the arrogant pseudopolitics, the mealy-mouthed half-truth'.⁹ As Haidt warned in 2012(b), 'compromise' has become a dirty word. However, the need for compromise, for common ground and for liberalism is evident from Haidt's work to counter growing political polarisation. 'The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity'.¹⁰ The Dunning-Kruger effect provides some support for this observation by Yeats. If the left-liberal project is to survive at the ballot-box, it needs to market itself as the best, with conviction, to repudiate its 'mealy-mouthed' reputation and reclaim its values from its extreme representatives' interpretations. Perhaps more than anybody else, Jonathan Haidt has attempted to address Peterson's concern for the Left from a measured centrist position and with his focus on left-liberals in *The Righteous Mind*.

Indeed, the reason I seem so hard on liberals is that I think they changed their spots in the 1960s and 1970s in a bad way – the turn to the "New Left" led the left away from the morality of most Americans and into some positions that I think are hard to justify, morally.¹¹

The place of the Left in Left-Right politics

The above quote comes from a blog post by Haidt justifying his analogy of Left and Right as Yin and Yang.¹² Right and Left have often been described as opposing forces, but can also be seen as necessary and complementary energies – e.g. hierarchy and egalitarianism, stability and change, creation and destruction, orderliness and openness.¹³ Perhaps even the idea of the 'Divided Brain' in *The Master and His Emissary*¹⁴ could be mapped onto a divided political world, not just for the East-West perspective but Right and Left (contralateral to the hemispheres) as defence and exploration, or reality and imagination.¹⁵ A major point is that both perspectives are necessary to navigate in the world as individuals, as social creatures and as societies. So how to demarcate the place of the Left? What is the *unique and useful* contribution of the Left?

The Left-Right political orientations stem from the French Revolution and a split between deputies in the French National Constituent Assembly over the veto power and authority of the King.¹⁶ As Geoffrey Hodgson asserts in his article *How the politics of the Left lost its way*, the left originally stood for 'liberty, human rights, and equality under the law... The original Left opposed justifications of authority derived from religion or from noble birth. It supported democracy and private enterprise'.¹⁷ The opposition to theocratic and aristocratic

⁶ White 2010, 6.

⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁸ Haidt 2016a.

⁹ Saval 2017, para. 11.

¹⁰ Yeats, as cited by Haidt 2016a.

¹¹ Haidt 2012c, para. 8.

¹² See also Haidt 2012a, ch. 12.

¹³ See Peterson & Haidt 2017.

¹⁴ McGilchrist 2010.

¹⁵ See Peterson & McGilchrist 2018.

¹⁶ Bréchon 2017.

¹⁷ Hodgson 2017, para. 7.

authoritarianism can properly be extended to opposing any identity-based (gender, racial, ethnic) authoritarianism. ‘Ostensibly, the Left has always stood for equality’.¹⁸

The value of equality

Peterson lauds equality, or at least addressing its antithesis, inequality, as the main purpose and value of the Left.¹⁹ Inequality is pervasive but also pernicious if allowed to grow. Inequality has been found to fuel resentment (Gegel, Lebedeva & Frolova, 2015); undermine democracy (Gilens & Page, 2014; Marien & Werner, 2018); negatively affect economic growth (Cingano, 2014); and lead to violence and suffering (Beyer, 2016; Brown & Stewart, 2015).

Inequality results from natural and artificial hierarchies. Peterson emphasises the natural element (pointing to the Pareto principle in natural distributions) to demonstrate that inequality is not simply a consequence of capitalism, but of any hierarchical structure. This is not an exculpation of inequality; it would be easy to strawman Peterson (as many have) and present his point as a naturalistic fallacy (i.e. Inequality *is*. Therefore, inequality *ought to be*). Peterson’s argument perhaps is more accurately summated as, ‘Inequality exists, what we can change we should, and what we cannot we should accept’. Now what we can and cannot change is the crux of some of the Left-Right divide, but steel-manning Peterson this way would have led to a far less adversarial Channel 4 interview (compare the Channel 4 Peterson interview to the Channel 4 Gawdat interview).

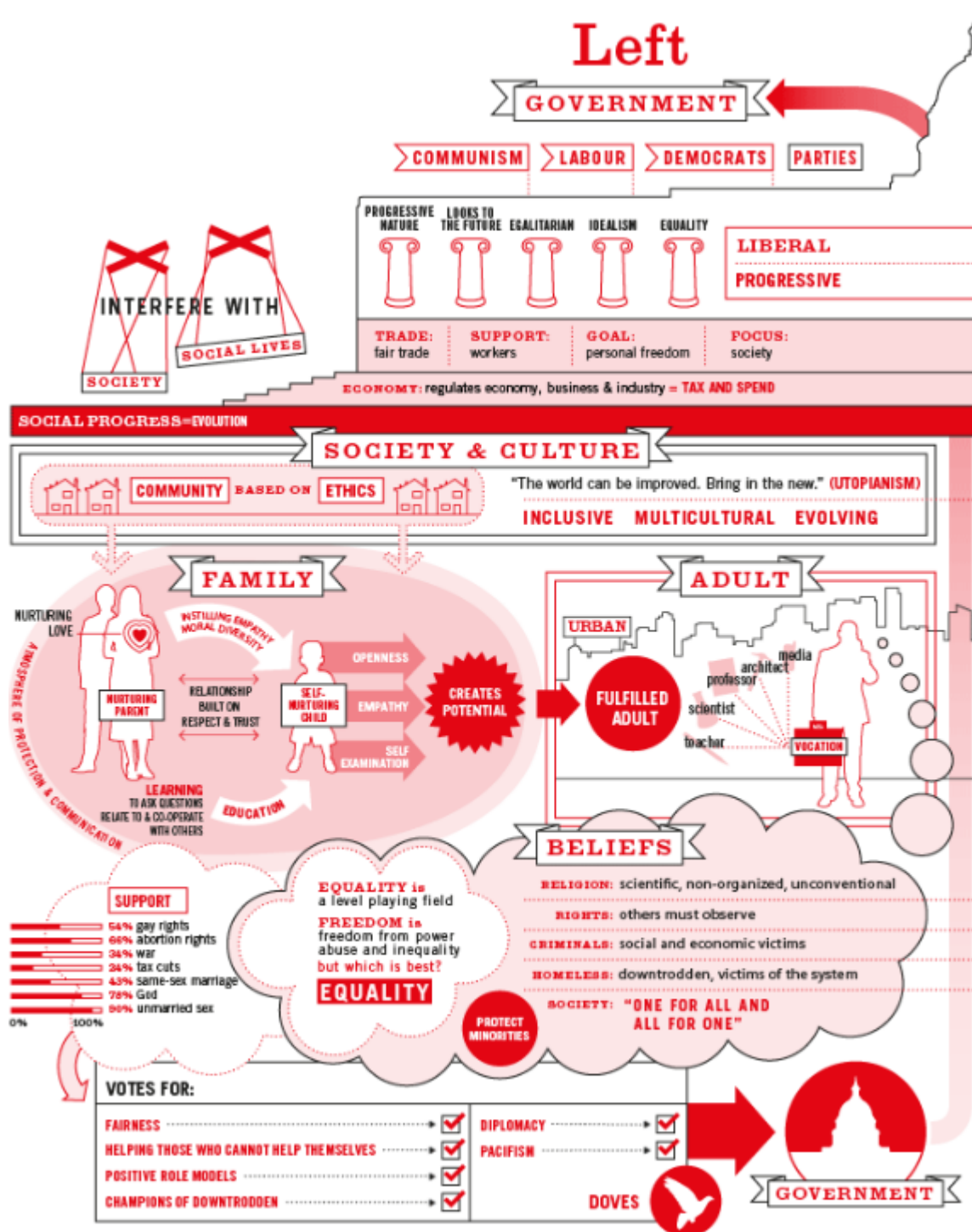
Peterson argues that many hierarchies are necessary (e.g. a hierarchy of values) in order to act, to progress, and to thrive. And so he believes a level of inequality is necessary and inevitable, but he recognises that inequality is ‘a massive social force and it can produce catastrophic consequences; so to be concerned about that politically is reasonable, but we do know that that concern can go too far’. Peterson cares about gross inequality and sees the encouragement or strengthening of the individual as the best intervention. How ‘concern can go too far’ relates to the idea that the cure can be worse than the disease, and the worst cure he can see on the Left for inequality is the interpretation of equality as equity (or Marxist egalitarianism). Champlin contrasts equality and egalitarianism in an effort to disambiguate the terms. Egalitarianism focuses on identity and equality of outcome. I argue it is not in the spirit of the original Left as described by Hodgson (2017) but is a consequence of the turn to the ‘New Left’ as described by Haidt (2012c). Champlin simply associates it with the Left and highlights the problems for equality in the means of achieving equity.

The egalitarian seeks equality in the absolute sense, where everyone is identical economically, socially, and politically. The egalitarian wanted equality of outcome. This necessarily means you have to treat people unequally. That is the only way to ensure everyone has the same outcome. Equality as equality of outcome is the sense in which the left uses the word “equal.” The other kind of equality, though, involves treating people equally. When you treat people equally, when you ensure that everyone is playing by the same rules, for example, you will not get equal outcomes. Rather, you will get a wide variety of outcomes, based on the interests, abilities, etc. of the people in question. What we are talking about here is really a notion of equal regard.

This definition of equality that is championed by Champlin, focuses on *equality of rights and opportunities*. It involves treating people fairly, or applying the rules or laws consistently while acknowledging individuals and groups have unequal distributions of gifts at birth, of circumstance and luck. This equality is an equality under the law, underpinned by the Nichoma-

¹⁸ Hodgson 2017, para. 8.

¹⁹ Peterson 2018a, b.



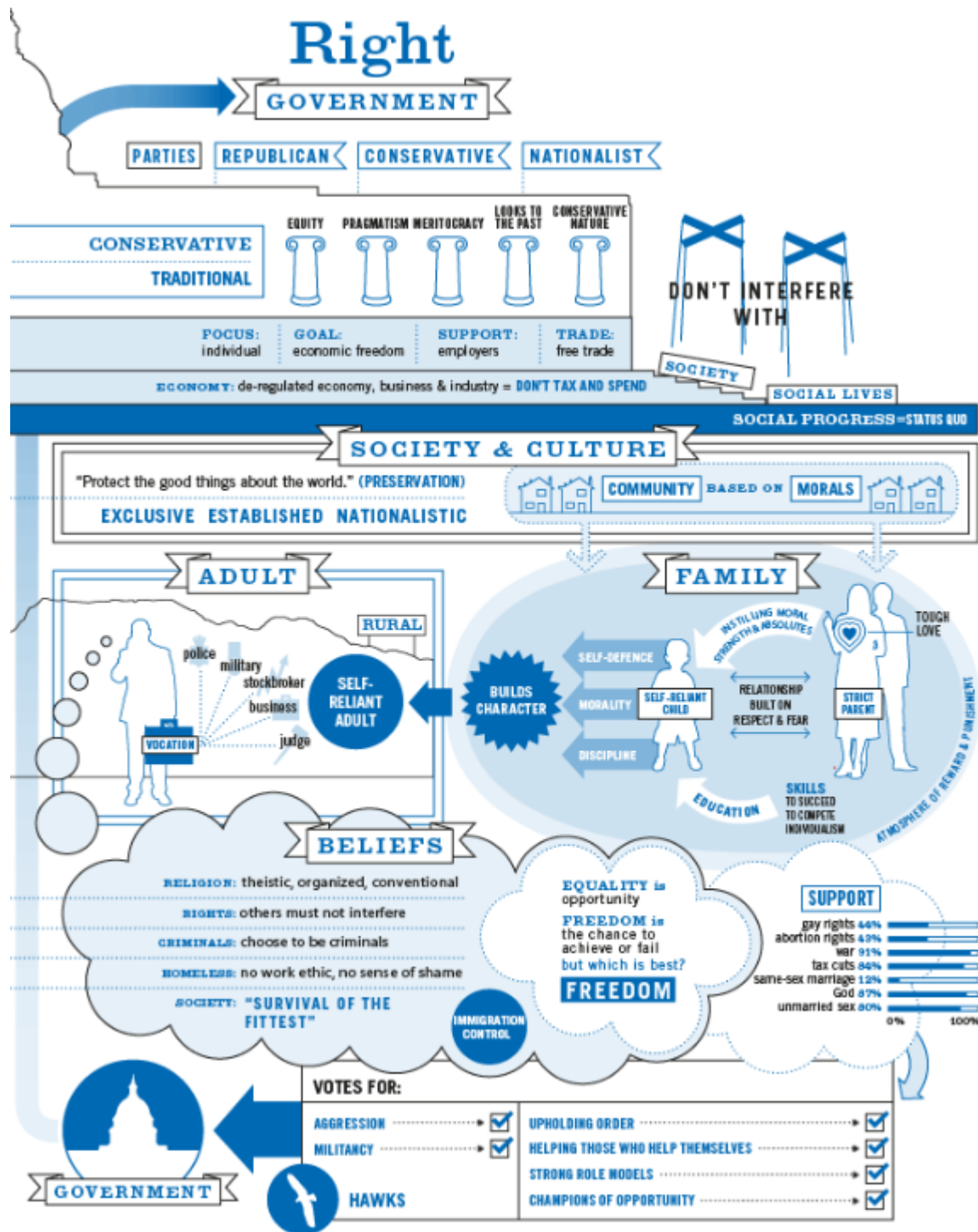


Figure 1: Left vs Right (World). Created by David McCandless, InformationIsBeautiful.net Available from <https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/left-vs-right-world/>

-clean Justice and Fairness ethical approach. Distributive justice, according to Aristotle,²⁰ demands we ‘treat equals equally and unequals proportionately unequally’. This idea of equality is fundamental to capitalism and the American Dream.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” he did not mean “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are clones.” Rather, that all men are equal in terms of their rights, and that every person ought to be treated as an individual, and not prejudged by the statistics of particular groups that they may belong to.²¹

Blank-slatism in reference to our underlying and shared humanity has been a bedrock for equality of opportunity and the universality of human rights. However, as Pinker points out in *The Blank Slate* (2003), there has been a denial of individual differences or an objection to any manifestation of these differences in outcomes – as evidence of inequality. Many on the Left have rejected evidence from differential psychology and the meritocratic idea that effort equals outcome (e.g. Ross, 2016; Littler, 2017).

Perhaps the most high profile recent case of this was the reaction to the sex difference claims made by James Damore (2017) in the now infamous Google Memo. Damore proffered this memo in response to requests for feedback after a diversity workshop at Google. The memo attempted to summarise psychological research to provide an explanation for the gender disparity at Google, as well as suggesting ways to address the disparity and increase diversity. In a reaction that involved Google firing Damore, Friedersdorf (2017b) exposed the anti-diversity mischaracterisations in journalistic accounts of the memo. Damore was discussing entry criteria (rather than excellence criteria) in highlighting interest in a job as being a prerequisite to applying for a job. Nonetheless, he was fired for ‘advancing harmful gender stereotypes in [the] workplace’ according to Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, who further misinterpreted the memo as applying to current Google employees and their suitability to work at Google – a suitability already evidenced by their already working there. ‘To suggest a group of our colleagues have traits that make them less biologically suited to that work is offensive and not OK’.²² Haidt and Stevens summarised the research support for the memo and tentatively concluded that ‘Damore was drawing attention to empirical findings that seem to have been previously unknown or ignored at Google, and which might be helpful to the company as it tries to improve its diversity policies and outcomes’.²³

However, the ‘effort equals outcome’ aspect of a meritocratic system is not without its problems. Belief in a ‘Just World’ is recognised as a cognitive bias (Lerner, as cited by Furnham, 2003); luck likely plays a significant role in success (Pluchino, Biondo & Rapisarda, 2018); and the influence of effort (in the guise of Deliberate Practice) on outcome has been questioned (Hambrick et al., 2014; Hambrick, Burgoyne, Macnamara & Ullén, 2018; Macnamara, Hambrick & Oswald, 2014). The complexity of what makes us successful is well covered by Kaufman (2013; 2014). So commentators on the Left add value here by questioning the fairness of competitive systems where opportunity can never be equal in Aristotle’s numerical sense. Numerical equality aligns with equality of outcome as it dictates equal portions of a good be distributed to all persons. This is only considered just (and a special case of proportional equality) when the quality upon which receipt of the good is predicated is equal across individuals – the possession of human rights by virtue of you being human, or constitutional rights by virtue of you being a citizen or within a jurisdiction. Opportunity and

²⁰ Cited in Curzer 2007, 223.

²¹ Pinker 2008.

²² Pichai 2017.

²³ Haidt & Stevens 2017, para. 51.

success are inexorably linked to effort as well as a multitude of other factors, none of which are likely distributed equally but proportionally across hierarchies.

Ultimately, the advocates for equality of opportunity do not deny hierarchies exist. Instead, they seek to increase social mobility within legitimate hierarchies (e.g. competence hierarchies) by continuous attempts to equalise opportunities where possible and by removing, through legal means if necessary, any influence from variables that should have no bearing on the proportionality of opportunity or success – e.g. skin colour, genitalia, sexual orientation, etc. This has been a focus of the Left since its political inception – to attack illegitimate hierarchies that are based on race, gender, inheritance, etc. A marker of pathology on the Left could be the failure to adequately distinguish and defend legitimate ‘just’ hierarchy from illegitimate or ‘unjust’ hierarchy. Still, advocates for equality of opportunity have work to do in improving and maintaining mobility within individualist, capitalist, competitive hierarchies. In a self-replication study, Kraus found that ‘people overestimate class mobility to protect their beliefs in the promise of equality of opportunity’.²⁴

The common good

Prussian Socialism (see Oswald Spengler, 1880-1936) attempted to distinguish between just (bourgeois) and unjust hierarchy (bourgeoisie). That is not to say that it did, but it had the potential to expand capitalistic meritocratic competence hierarchies into more civic-minded duty and responsibility hierarchies. Instead it serves as a warning of how discussions of cultural values also have the potential to transmogrify and descend into policies of discrimination and inhumanity. Prussian Socialism influenced National Socialism and Nazism. When American law school professors Amy Wax and Larry Alexander praised middle-class 1950’s American values in an opinion piece last year, they skewered themselves with the line: ‘All cultures are not equal’.²⁵ A summary of the authors’ op-ed, the response it garnered and a defence of the piece (or at least the authors’ right to such an opinion) was published by Haidt.²⁶ Here he highlights the importance of discussing cultural values, suggests Wax may have been correct, and argues that a rebuttal rather than a denouncement would be the appropriate response regardless. Interestingly, Wax’s argument that ‘Anglo-Protestant cultural norms are superior’ involved the combination of the cultural norms of ‘Knight’ and ‘Viking’ that Spengler saw as antagonistic.²⁷

Spengler proposed a social order linked to civic duty and earned status from contribution to the community. In *Preussentum und Sozialismus* (*Prussianism and Socialism*) (1919), Spengler contrasts the values of German and English culture along lines similar to the distinction by St Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* [On Christian Doctrine] of *caritas* and *cupiditas*.

A community united by the love of friendship instead of the acquisitive love of greed was supposed to take care of its members more zealously and with greater economy because all of its decisions would be governed by whatever was best for one's neighbors, rather than by whatever was best for one's self, alone. Selves in competition for scarce resources, so the doctrine went, would damage each other in their quest to amass riches in excess of what each one needed, whereas selves united for the common good would conserve and distribute community resources to the best benefit of all.²⁸

²⁴ Kraus 2015, 1.

²⁵ Wax & Alexander 2017, para. 9.

²⁶ Haidt 2017.

²⁷ Wax, as cited by Urbanski 2017.

²⁸ ‘Caritas vs. Cupiditas: Two Ways Cultures Understand Themselves’ n.d., para. 1.

Compare the above description of *caritas* and *cupiditas* to these excerpts from Spengler:

The respective “soul” of these peoples derives from the fact that the former [Prussians] are “knightly” peoples and the latter [English] “Vikings” (p. 61) – the Prussians feeling the great Germanic idea above them (the commitment to the community) and the English within them (a commitment to individual independence (p. 31)). This clash is therefore one between an English community of happiness and a Prussian community of duty; money versus rank; job versus occupation; free trade versus autarky; “the gentleman’s garb” versus the “uniform” (p. 37), art versus literature. “Every man for himself: that is English. Every man for every other man: that is Prussian” (ibid.).²⁹

Spengler criticised Marx for operating within that Anglo-centric materialist mindset and ultimately providing a ‘capitalism of the working class’.³⁰ He saw Marx’s translation of the antagonistic national values (the German and English ‘spirit’) onto the conflict between classes in society, as a mistake.³¹ While the far right tend to preserve the dangerous prejudices of religious and ethnic purity, many on the far left maintain the Spenglerean idea of cultural purity (unfortunately in some cases with a similar level of anti-Semitism – e.g. UK Labour Party (Elgot, 2018)). Their cultural protections mainly focus on minority cultures as they attempt to draw battle lines over cultural ownership and rights. They are cultural segregationists and often racists. A very recent case of this – an American teenager wearing a traditional Chinese dress to her prom – is summarised by Kassie Draven in *The Independent* (2018). A possible marker of pathology can be found here in the often-zealous, over-application of the sociological concept of cultural appropriation – a concept that rests on treating cultures as bounded unchanging objects (with functional fixedness – a cognitive bias), or at least only changing with the expressed wishes of the owners. Owners, who take credit for a culture inherited, a culture that is constantly changing through co-creation and translation. It is an oddly conservative, closed-minded notion for the Left. These arguments of cultural appropriation make the same mistake that Wax made when she associated values with a culture (and later ethnicity); they associate ethnicity and heritage with a culture. In addition to cultural purity, Spengler’s Prussian Socialism harbours an idealism that defines socialist movements allied with a dangerous authoritarianism or elitism harking back to Plato’s aristocracy as ideal rule.

Let us envision a unified nation in which every one is assigned his place according to his socialistic rank, his talent for voluntary self-discipline based on inner conviction, his organisational abilities, his work potential, consciousness, and energy, his intelligent willingness to serve the common cause. Let us plan for general work conscription, resulting in occupational guilds that will administrate and at the same time be guided by an administrative council, and not by a parliament.³²

Thomas Sowell views this surrogate decision-making as problematic for the left, as he argues it can lead to totalitarianism, the type expressly recommended by Spengler.

[T]he vision of the left is one of surrogate decision-making by those presumed to have not only superior knowledge but sufficient knowledge, whether these surrogates are political leaders, experts, judges or others. This is the vision that is common to varying degrees on the political left, whether radical or moderate, and common also to totalitarians, whether Communist or Fascist. A commonality of purpose in society is central to collective decision-making, whether expressed in town-meeting democracy or totalitarian dictatorship or other variations in between. One of the differences between the commonality of purposes in democratic systems of government and totalitarian systems of government is in the range of

²⁹ Spengler, as cited by Lewis, 2017.

³⁰ Jacob n.d.

³¹ Herf 1986, 50.

³² Spengler, as cited by Jacob n.d., para. 41

decisions infused with that commonality of purpose and in the range of decisions reserved for individual decision-making outside the purview of government.³³

Surrogate decision-making differs in both kind (personal to governmental) and degree (the Eysenck T-factor (1957) or perhaps the better-known libertarian-authoritarian axis – Figure 2). Surrogate decision-making is not just the province of the Left as the opposite of totalitarianism is not conservatism but anarchy, and most liberal positions on the Left-Right spectrum uphold democratic principles (on a continuum from anarchy-democracy-totalitarianism). Additionally, many on the Right would support mandatory minimum sentencing, health-care surrogacy and strong paternalism within families and education. According to the Moral Foundations Theory (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt, 2012a), the Right are more sensitive to the Loyalty, Authority, Sanctity foundations. Therefore, the Left do not have a monopoly on acceptance and promotion of surrogate decision-making.

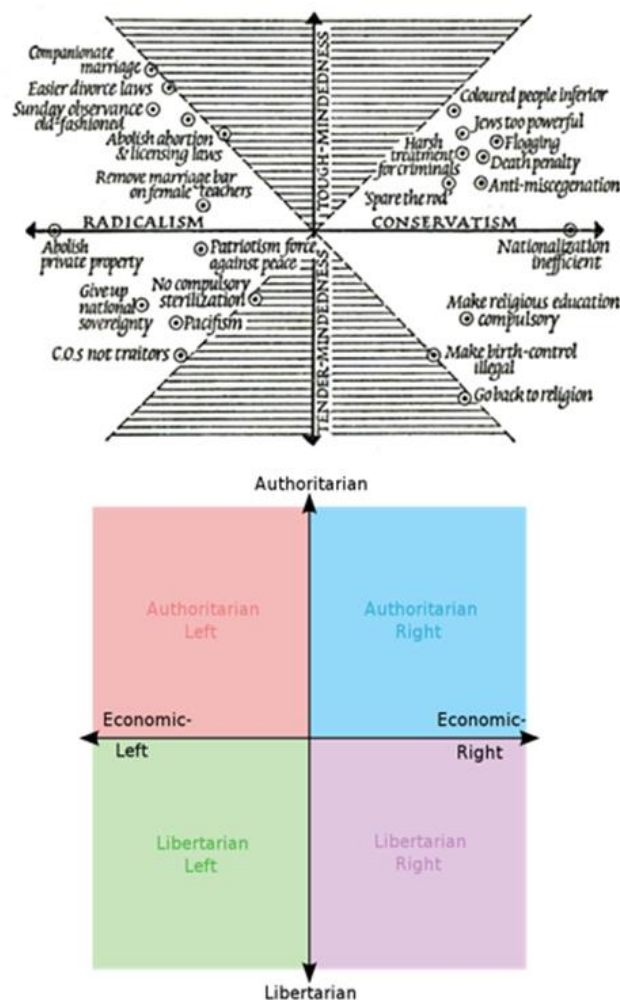


Figure 2: a) Eysenck's (1957) T-factor (tough-minded to tender-minded). b) A chart proposed by the Political Compass Organization with orthogonal axes similar to Eysenck's R-factor (x-axis; which could similarly distinguish social attitudes) and T-factor.

³³ Sowell 2012, 105.

I would also argue that Sowell has confused vision with method to begin with, as ‘surrogate decision-making’ is a method for achieving a vision. A vision is teleological, it is an imagined destination, an ideal state of being, and living together and therefore identifying a political vision requires assessment of goals or values. When Sowell talks of vision in *A conflict of visions* (2007) he distinguishes ‘constrained’ from ‘unconstrained’ vision, the former associated with conservatism and the latter with the liberal belief that ‘people should be left as free as possible to pursue their own courses of personal development’.³⁴

The liberal-left appear to consider equality as instrumental to achieving the distinctly more socialist concern for the common good. Reducing inequality is in the common good, as is universalising access to and benefits from our social institutions. The Common Good ethical approach sees the creation of political and civil society and the rule of law as necessary to avoid an endless ‘war of all against all’.³⁵ Appeals to the common good urge us to view ourselves as members of the same community, as Spengler encouraged Prussians to do, but without recourse to surface identity to decide membership. The common good requires us to reflect on broad questions concerning the kind of values we should collectively uphold and how we are to achieve a society that embodies such values, as Wax and Alexander did, but without recourse to the racial or cultural ownership of those values. The late historian, Tony Judt, advocated for a return to common good considerations in *Ill Fares the Land* (2010), and emphasised Adam Smith’s social values (moral sentiments) over market values. This social contract sacrifices some freedom to gain security, individual and collective benefit. Ceding total power to the government, i.e. totalitarianism, is not synonymous with the Left. In Milton Rokeach’s content analysis of works by Socialist, Capitalist, Communist and Nazi writers (1973), freedom as a value ranks first for both Socialists and Capitalists (compared to 16th and 17th for Nazi and Communist texts respectively). Equality as a value differentiated Socialists/Communists (2nd/1st) from Capitalists/Nazis (16th/17th). Nevertheless, Sowell warns:

Democratic versions of collective surrogate decision-making by government choose leaders by votes and tend to leave more areas outside the purview of government. However, the left seldom has any explicit principle by which the boundaries between government and individual decision-making can be determined, so that the natural tendency over time is for the scope of government decision-making to expand, as more and more decisions are taken successively from private hands.³⁶

The charge here that the left lacks an explicit principle to establish boundaries echoes the claim about a lack of markers in the opening Peterson quote. While identifying markers may be possible, the boundaries for surrogate decision-making are established through negotiation and participation in the democratic process – the will of the people. Boundaries are best enshrined in constitutional protections, checks and balances against mission creep (i.e. government overreach). Moreover, arguably the best way of policing boundaries for government overreach is through the American First Amendment – the protection of the rights to free conscience, free speech, free press and protest.

Free speech

Although the importance of free speech is well established, its abandonment by some on the far left may be a marker of pathology. The right to free speech is butting heads with the invented right not to be offended. Peterson (2017) echoes Daryl Bem’s Self-Perception Theory (1967; 1972) when he argues that in order to think we need to be able to articulate our thoughts. And

³⁴ Graham, Haidt & Nosek 2009, 1029-30.

³⁵ Hobbes 1651.

³⁶ Sowell 2012, 106.

in order to discover what is true we must be able to speak what we believe is true which requires free speech. Many who advocate public shaming for wrong speak or who push for personal (in cases career-ending) consequences for expression of an offensive opinion are choosing to use their free speech to punish the person rather than disabuse them of their dangerous idea. If you use free speech to try to limit free speech, you cannot simultaneously claim to care about free speech. Free speech does have recognised limits as described by Tatchell: You do not have the right to defame a person with untrue damaging allegations; you do not have the right to make ‘sustained threats, harassment and menaces against another person’; you do not have the right to ‘advocate or incite violence’.³⁷ All of these limits are complicated further in online spaces, especially the line drawn for bullying and harassment which can now manifest in a wave of toxic mobbing. It is unfortunate that many on the far left do not recognise their own breach of these limits when they go after the latest provocative, conservative pariah. Richard Reeves and Jonathan Haidt recently published an illustrated version of chapter two of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859). In *All Minus One* (2018) they summarise Mill’s three-pronged defence of free speech – the value of free speech, not simply its constitutional protection. According to the Heterodox Academy authors, chapter two contains ‘the best arguments ever made for the importance of free speech and viewpoint diversity’.³⁸ I would throw Christopher Hitchens’s hat in the ring for that accolade (see Hitchens’s debate at the University of Toronto, 2006; or his debate with Shashi Tharoor, 2007). Undoubtedly, though, in Hitchens’s defence of free speech, particularly against consensus public opinion, we hear the ideas of Mill:

Mill’s main concern was not government censorship. It was with the stultifying consequences of social conformity, of a culture where deviation from a prescribed set of opinions is punished through peer pressure and the fear of ostracism. “Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough,” he wrote. “There needs to be protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling.” Mill saw people even as brilliant as Charles Darwin living in fear of the response their views would provoke.³⁹

Mill argued that free speech was necessary as firstly, there may be truth in the opinion expressed, and that would be undiscernible if the opinion was suppressed. This idea of pursuing the truth through dialogue and exchange cuts to the heart of scientific discovery and the Socratic Method which Socrates likened to ‘intellectual midwifery’. The birth of ideas can only come through their expression and engagement with others. Free speech allows us to see if there is something good in an idea (Socrates’s ‘noble and true birth’), or to find better ways to challenge poor ideas (Socrates’s ‘false idols’).

Secondly, Mill argues that if you operate within an intellectual echo chamber your ideas are never properly tested. This idea can also be traced back to Plato’s *Theaetetus* and a previous dialogue *The Meno*, where the distinction between true belief and knowledge is considered. Knowledge is claimed when one can articulate and defend the justification for holding a belief to be true. The belief requires testing against the best opposing arguments. These counter-arguments are extremely difficult for individuals to generate themselves due to a whole host of cognitive biases, e.g. confirmation bias and motivated reasoning, and so Haidt sees institutionalised disconfirmation (the Heterodox Academy) as necessary.

Thirdly, Mill asserts that ‘conflicting doctrines share the truth between them’. This dialectical method is also captured in the quote ‘Truth springs from argument amongst friends’, often attributed to David Hume (but I have been unable to find a citation). Not only does this final reason reiterate the importance of testing one’s beliefs in the marketplace of ideas but it

³⁷ Tatchell 2018.

³⁸ Reeves & Haidt 2018, 3.

³⁹ *ibid.*

highlights how limiting free speech or disengaging from dialogue is detrimental to finding the truth and ultimately progress. Shutting down speech should be the antithesis of a progressive Left. However, Dave Rubin (a popular classical liberal YouTuber) recently singled out the Left as stagnating from failing to engage with intellectual and political opponents, ‘Your ideas get fat and lazy when you don’t have to work them out because you’ve owned the narrative for so long. This is where the modern Left finds itself right now’. In a detailed piece for *Newsweek* on the changing tide for free speech on American college campuses, Nina Burleigh (2016) concludes with the question:

It remains to be seen whether graduates in the Class of 2016, released into an angry, boorish Trumpian America, full of insults to women and proverbial—so far—walls for minorities, will sally out and meet the adversary or find themselves at a loss for words.⁴⁰

Disengaged sermonising

‘People don’t look at the argument anymore. They look at who’s saying it.’⁴¹

There is disengagement from the message to focus on the messenger (the definition of the argumentative fallacy *ad hominem*). This disengagement is compounded by whom the messenger talks to. There have been attacks on left-leaning individuals that appear on conservative talk shows (e.g. Bret Weinstein’s appearance on Tucker Carlson (Zimmerman, 2017), articles that eschew dialogue and bipartisan agreements (Leyden & Teixeira, 2018) and parliamentarians who see conservative opposition as the ‘enemy’ (Harker & Sodha, 2017). It is emblematic of political polarisation and points to another marker of pathology – ideological purity and contagion. The far left (possibly not uniquely to the far right) seem to operate under an ‘all or nothing’, ‘with us or against us’ absolutism. While many liberals on the Left-Right political spectrum can find sufficient agreement to forge alliances and make progress together, at the extremes exists an ideological purity where one must adhere to the orthodox opinion on all issues or be cast out (the Left eating their own is a common meme). The liberal-left could be considered political satisficers and the far left political maximisers (after the distinction made by Simon in 1957 and later by Schwartz et al., 2002). Satisficers (a portmanteau of satisfy and suffice) are better able to compromise in their decision-making after reaching a minimum set of acceptable terms. Maximisers are concerned with getting the best possible outcome, and usually have a longer set of requirements to obtain an outcome with which they are happy. Research by Schwartz and colleagues suggests that maximisers (more than satisficers) operate under the influence of social rivalry where they want to be seen to be the best (Weaver, Daniloski, Schwartz & Cottone, 2015).

It would be interesting to see if the far left (and the far right) differ from the liberal centre in terms of assessment mode and promotion focus (prevention focus for the far right) as motivational constructs that are suggested to predict maximising. Assessors are concerned with high standards and ‘an emphasis on careful and comprehensive evaluation’.⁴² Promoters are also concerned with high standards but ‘with a preference for eager (vs. vigilant) strategies to achieve goals’.⁴³ Kolakowski described Marxism as such an eager strategy (a heuristic).

One of the causes of the popularity of Marxism among educated people was the fact that in its simple form it was very easy; even Sartre noticed that Marxists are lazy. Indeed, they enjoyed having one key to open all doors, one universally applicable explanation for

⁴⁰ Burleigh 2016, para. 56.

⁴¹ Gervais 2018.

⁴² Hughes 2018, 14.

⁴³ Hughes 2018, 15.

everything, an instrument that makes it possible to master all of history and economics without actually having to study either.⁴⁴

Doing what is right compels a high moral standard but in political space with issue advocates on an endless number of social problems; maintaining political correctness on every issue to uphold an ideological purity and superiority must take its toll. At the extreme you might find an unsustainable combination of intuitive politician, theologian and prosecutor (from Tetlock's Social Functionalist framework, 2002) trying to 'prosecute and convict their opponents'.⁴⁵ Similar thoughts can be found in an unusual place. Let this be a test for your tolerance of viewpoint diversity and the open discussion of ideas.

The Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, provided a critique of the Left in his manifesto *Industrial Society and its Future* published by the *Washington Post* in 1995, under threat of terrorism. Citing Kaczynski's ideas on the Left from a section titled *The Psychology of Modern Leftism* in no way justifies his campaign of terror. Bear in mind, the manifesto did not reference research and some accusations are arguably unjustified and unfalsifiable. His critique is broad-brush and inaccurate for the Left as a whole. He gives the caveat in paragraph 23, 'We emphasize that the foregoing does not pretend to be an accurate description of everyone who might be considered a leftist. It is only a rough indication of a general tendency of leftism' and a further caveat in paragraph 31. In his critique, he highlights two factors: Feelings of inferiority are, according to Kaczynski, characteristic of the entire Left and oversocialisation is a factor for an influential subset of the Left.

To support his point on feelings of inferiority he refers to a number of behaviours which might usefully abstract to a marker of pathology. For instance, paragraphs 11-14 focus on political correctness and what Kaczynski sees as the projection of feelings of inferiority onto 'minority groups whose rights [the Left] defend'. Paragraph 15 concerns criticism of America and the West for faults found more frequently in other countries or cultures (e.g. imperialism, sexism and ethnocentrism), suggesting that the real issue is with power and highlighting the soft bigotry of low expectations. Paragraph 18 concerns post-modernist relativism and related anti-science/anti-reason tendencies (which are human tendencies when sacred values are challenged).⁴⁶ Paragraph 21 questions the authenticity of the concern on the Left, suggesting the motivation is more to do with hatred of the Right than care for others. This paragraph is a lesson on tone that, coming from a man who terrorised America through a bombing campaign to air some grievances, is a bit rich. Arguably, though, aside from the violent, thuggish subset of anti-fascist fascists and the ad hominem throwing discussion-avoiders on the Left, that compared to the Right the liberal-left understand the importance of tone. 'Facts don't care about your feelings', a phrase pinned to influential conservative Ben Shapiro's twitter and often repeated on the Right may be true but it underappreciates the importance of tone in persuasion – again, not truth but persuasion. We are not facts, we are humans, and humans should care about feelings.

The widening political polarisation is, in part, due to the 'fighting-talk' we use to describe our differences, i.e. the Culture War. Will Schoder (2017) provides an excellent introduction to the importance of tone in argumentation. Using Haidt's metaphor of the rider and the elephant, Schoder gives a philosophical and psychological defence of tone and clearly differentiates an argument from a fight. Only good faith arguments will allow people to reconcile, or at the very least accept, their differences. Sally Kohn (2018) offers the ABC method as advice for engaging people with different political opinions – affirm, bridge,

⁴⁴ Kolakowski 2002, para. 15.

⁴⁵ Haidt 2015.

⁴⁶ Haidt 2012a.

convince. The Left should embrace emotional correctness and good faith discussion (Kohn, 2013; 2018) instead of adherence to an ever more clinical political correctness. Kaczynski argues for a similar diplomacy (contrary to his own lack of diplomacy):

Leftists may claim that their activism is motivated by compassion or by moral principles, and moral principle does play a role for the leftist of the oversocialized type. But compassion and moral principle cannot be the main motives for leftist activism. Hostility is too prominent a component of leftist behavior; so is the drive for power. Moreover, much leftist behavior is not rationally calculated to be of benefit to the people whom the leftists claim to be trying to help. For example, if one believes that affirmative action is good for black people, does it make sense to demand affirmative action in hostile or dogmatic terms? [...] Instead, race problems serve as an excuse for them to express their own hostility and frustrated need for power. In doing so they actually harm black people, because the activists' hostile attitude toward the white majority tends to intensify race hatred.⁴⁷

The hostility and emotionality mentioned here are now summarised by the pejorative label 'Social Justice Warrior' (SJW), a clumsy and lamentable term that trivialises the importance of social justice and propagates the aforementioned warlike language. The clumsiness of language could also be addressed with appreciation of nuance and the use of qualifiers like some, many and most. A possible pathological marker for some on the far left might be understood as disengagement (or disingenuous engagement). The Chinese also have a derogatory term to describe this type of Leftism – Baizuo (白左), which means 'white liberal', or 'stupid liberal', and ridicules a type of liberal posturing and proselytising, a 'hypocritical humanitarianism' and a lack of engagement with differing opinions.⁴⁸ A core component of this label is captured in the French term 'les donneur de leçons' (literally lesson-givers), and it is with this criticism of sermonising we find Kaczynski's charge of oversocialisation – the hyper-conformity of some on the Left to highly demanding societal moral standards.

The connection between inferiority and oversocialisation might be understood through the work of Alfred Adler (1870-1937). Elements of the Left may build narratives, i.e. hold lifestyle convictions/private logic (Feltham, Hanley & Winter, 2017), that promote a collective Adlerian 'inferiority complex' – 'the presentation of the [minority] to [themselves] and others that [they are] not strong enough to solve a given problem in a socially useful way'.⁴⁹ Their own inferiority may be useful in explaining refusals to engage in dialogue. Mosak (as cited by Feltham, Hanley & Winter, 2017) lists five basic mistakes that people commonly make in their lifestyle convictions. Compounding these mistakes in their narrative, the far left may justify oversocialisation (overcompensation) to counter feelings of inferiority.

1. Overgeneralisations.
2. False or Impossible Goals of Security.
3. Misperception of Life and Life's Demands.
4. Minimisation or Denial of One's Worth.
5. Faulty Values.

Haidt, being a moral psychologist, discusses moral differences across the political spectrum in much of his work. Commenting on his 2016 APA keynote address in an interview with the editor of *The Psychologist*, Haidt says, 'They're turning on the converted, I'd say. They're not preaching: they're attacking, they're demanding, they're criticising. They are the height of the hypermoralism that I was talking about in my keynote last night'.⁵⁰ Kaczynski dedicates nine

⁴⁷ Kaczynski 1995, para. 21.

⁴⁸ Qu 2017; Zhang 2017.

⁴⁹ Ansbacher & Ansbacher 1956, 258.

⁵⁰ Sutton 2016, para 3.

paragraphs (24-32) to articulating his point on oversocialisation, but for the purpose of identifying a pathological marker, paragraph 26 will suffice.

Oversocialization can lead to low self-esteem, a sense of powerlessness, defeatism, guilt, etc. One of the most important means by which our society socializes children is by making them feel ashamed of behavior or speech that is contrary to society's expectations. If this is overdone, or if a particular child is especially susceptible to such feelings, he ends by feeling ashamed of HIMSELF. Moreover the thought and the behavior of the oversocialized person are more restricted by society's expectations than are those of the lightly socialized person. The majority of people engage in a significant amount of naughty behavior. They lie, they commit petty thefts, they break traffic laws, they goof off at work, they hate someone, they say spiteful things or they use some underhanded trick to get ahead of the other guy. The oversocialized person cannot do these things, or if he does do them he generates in himself a sense of shame and self-hatred. The oversocialized person cannot even experience, without guilt, thoughts or feelings that are contrary to the accepted morality; he cannot think "unclean" thoughts. And socialization is not just a matter of morality; we are socialized to conform to many norms of behavior that do not fall under the heading of morality. Thus the oversocialized person is kept on a psychological leash and spends his life running on rails that society has laid down for him. In many oversocialized people this results in a sense of constraint and powerlessness that can be a severe hardship. We suggest that oversocialization is among the more serious cruelties that human beings inflict on one another.⁵¹

Reference to 'unclean thoughts' might direct us towards a possible marker of far left extremism – that of ceremonious thought policing. With an activism that demands conformity of thought on the threat of ostracism or character assassination or actual violent suppression (the Left eating its own), the point on ideological purity mentioned above has particular means of enforcement with some on the Left. Words and ideas are given added potency and treated as weapons. Speech, hateful speech, is considered violence (Baer, 2017; Feldman Barrett, 2017; Morris, 2017). Hate speech is policed without any clear definition as to what qualifies as hate speech. To point out the absurdity of such a situation in the law is not a support of hate speech; it is an acceptance that we cannot legislate civility into existence. Civility only comes through dialogue and understanding and laws against violence. And speech (save the limitations of bullying, genuine threats and incitement to violence) is not violence. Propagating the idea that speech is violence is a bad idea, and it has been shown as such (Friedersdorf, 2017a; Gup, 2017; Haidt & Lukianoff, 2017; Mali, 2017, Nossel, 2017).

The banning of speech or the de-platforming of speakers must come after somebody, at least, has heard their speech and deemed it inappropriate. Who then gets to be the arbiter of moral thought and speech? Why should such a gatekeeper have the freedom to listen to an idea and decide for him or herself whether it is worthy of consumption, but deny the same freedom of choice to other inquisitive minds? We need to listen to what people say (or at least be given the opportunity to listen should we wish to) instead of relying on second-hand accounts of someone's views. As Bertrand Russell warned in 1945, 'A stupid man's report of what a clever man says can never be accurate, because he unconsciously translates what he hears into something he can understand'. More often nowadays, people seem content enough with hearing that a person has bad ideas or is a bad person (invalidating any idea they might have) that they not only refuse to listen to their ideas but also want to prevent others from listening.

Restricting access to ideas is not progressive. Exposure *to* an idea is not infection *with* an idea. Ideas can be bad; ideas can even be dangerous, but to treat them as virulent to the extent that they need to be quarantined infantilises the minds of others and belies the soft bigotry of low expectations. 'My mind is sufficiently resistant against such threatening

⁵¹ Kaczynski 1995, para. 26.

infectious ideas but yours is not, so I must protect you from contagion'. This mental protectionism (or coddling – see Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015) ignores the best inoculation we have against dangerous contagious ideas... that being better ideas! Better ideas brought about from the confluence of educated minds and open discussion. As the famous Louis Brandeis quote goes, 'Publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants'; or if you like your wisdom to be more ancient, Aristotle: 'It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it'. But where are we educating our young minds? Far from being a hotbed of intellectual diversity and institutional disconfirmation, the university, as suggested by Kaczynski in paragraph 27, is a hotbed of oversocialisation.

Advocating for education

This 'oversocialised professoriate' claim is recognisable, in a less radical form, as the liberal bias in education. This left-leaning bias is well established (Abrams, 2016; Duarte et al., 2015; Kristof, 2016; Langbert, 2018; Long, 2013) though some have doubted its prevalence (Hanlon, 2016). It was a driving force in the establishment of the Heterodox Academy, of which I am a member. While most accept the disparity, only some celebrate the liberal dominance in universities (Whyman, 2017); many more downplay its effects and argue it is the result of an interest-driven self-selection (like the overrepresentation of men at Google) (Gross, 2016; Jacoby, 2016; Jaschik, 2017). Even if this is the case, if the disparity has detrimental effects on learning and on wider social cohesion, it should be addressed. The Heterodox Academy Blog provides a great source of discussion, critique and commentary on this topic.⁵²

The university needs ideological diversity, but it must have academic freedom and uphold the principles of free speech. It must, because the university correctly constituted and prestiged in a society, is one of the checks against government overreach that should alleviate Sowell's concern for surrogate decision-making creeping toward totalitarianism. The university is the 'critic and conscience of society',⁵³ and a healthy third-level sector is necessary to maintain democratic standards, civic protections and social and economic development.⁵⁴ 'Where are we going to learn to mingle and debate in a respectful and intelligent forum if we can't even do it at most universities?' concludes Heather Long in her *Guardian* article from 2013. Free speech at universities is not just the freedom to speak, but perhaps more importantly, the freedom to listen. You cannot force people to speak and you cannot force people to listen. While protest against a speaker, professor, students' union or management decision should be encouraged/welcomed or at the very least tolerated, once that protest interferes with the freedom of others to listen, toleration is no longer progressive.

Haidt argues that there needs to be a schism in American universities as some institutions have as their *telos* (or ultimate purpose) truth seeking, whereas others prioritise the goal of Social Justice (activism) over the goal of seeking truth.⁵⁵ He gives the University of Chicago with its commitment to free speech as an example of the former (Truth U) and Brown University and its uniting around a University agenda of social justice as an example of the

⁵² For example, Jarret Crawford (2015) provided a response to 33 critiques of the Duarte et al. article on bias in social psychology and listed recommendations for ameliorating academic bias. Woessner, Jussim and Crawford (2016) outlined, with reference to research, numerous implications of academic liberal bias. More recently, Sean Stevens (2018) summarised research by Henry and Napier (2017) that finds education positively correlates with ideological intolerance. Education reducing tolerance (not acceptance) of differing opinions is a worrying finding.

⁵³ Virgo 2017.

⁵⁴ Murphy 2017.

⁵⁵ Haidt 2016.

latter (Social Justice U). Where Jon Haidt states that the telos of scholarship is truth I would completely agree; however, universities do much more than scholarship (where research and scholarship equate to knowledge creation, teaching and education equate to knowledge transfer, and scientific outreach, academic engagement, university-industry partnerships and commercialisation equate to knowledge translation (Perkmann et al., 2013)). So I would disagree here with Haidt, the telos of a university must always be social justice (emphasis on the small s, small j), not as mindless activism but a social justice rooted in truth.

However, truth is not an end in itself; truth is instrumental for change. Haidt is correct that if social justice is your instrument to finding the truth you will end up with a very biased and convenient truth. Instead, truth operates in the service of social justice (Figure 3). We see this in the scientific method where the final step is dissemination, or in the aims of science to describe, explain, predict and control (psychology swaps out control for ‘change, if the change is desirable’). We tell people what we find, we discuss the implications and applications of our findings, we engage in applied research. Instead of being competing purposes, truth and social justice are complementary where truth is the foundation for true social justice. The Heterodox Academy formed to improve truth seeking at universities by advocating for viewpoint diversity (that is a social justice aim). Haidt, through his organisation Ethical Systems, also advocates for more ethical business leadership and practice – applying his knowledge of and expertise in moral psychology to address a real-world problem (that is a social justice aim).



Figure 3: Illustration of the relationship between factors necessary for a healthy third-level sector.

For all three reasons given by Mill, we need free speech to better understand ourselves, each other and the world. Nevertheless, that understanding is not an end in itself. Better truth (accurate, verifiable, investigated rather than revealed) makes better change. We have evidence-based practice, empirically supported therapies, research-informed teaching, etc. I would suggest (as illustrated in Figure 3) that there are pre-requisite components (Resources) additional to free speech that are necessary for truth seeking. The resourcing of education is fundamental. And free speech not only operates at the level of truth seeking but is necessary (in the form of academic freedom) to criticise government policy and advocate for things like

better-funded universities, increased access to education and higher learning, better working and teaching conditions.

Working and teaching conditions have a direct influence on the likelihood of free speech at universities and in turn the health of debate. Academics in increasingly insecure positions are less likely to speak their minds as their contracts are at risk. Barrett makes this rare connection between precariousness and free speech at universities. The author chronicles the shift from ‘intellectual communities comprised of full-time scholars to collections of part-time instructors earning low wages, jettisoning from one campus to another in order to cobble together a living’.⁵⁶ The article, while harsh on its framing of free speech concerns as a sideshow or distraction, clearly links the health of free speech to administrative moves to expand and exploit a casualised workforce:

Such administrative decisions cut to the core of what we mean by campus free speech. The current debate has focused on the importance of preserving safe spaces or the freedom to provoke, but free speech also depends on the structural conditions that allow scholars to teach courses they believe in and meaningfully contribute to the intellectual development of their universities.⁵⁷

These ‘structural conditions’ fall under Resources in the model (Figure 3). If we truly care about equality of opportunity, liberals should re-double focus on education and the access to and improvement of universities as intellectually vibrant and challenging places, welcoming of ideas regardless of identity or ideology. The ‘academic-as-activist’ is a troublesome combination and is likely incommensurate with a purpose of finding the truth or pursuing social justice that is actually just. There cannot be justice without truth, and there cannot be truth in a precarious, competitive, publish or perish, market-driven education sector that undermines faculty, treats students as customers and education as a commodity. There has been no connection made between the illiberal campus activism by students shutting down speakers and petitioning for the firing of professors and the student-as-customer model of education. The Left can make a unique and useful contribution here to oppose conservative and neoliberal moves to bureaucratised and neuter academia through managerialism and constraints on academic freedom.⁵⁸ The purpose of a college degree is not only to get a job and contribute to the economy but also to develop personally and contribute to the social, civic and democratic health of the nation. Advocacy for education is necessary beyond ideological diversity, and free speech is necessary for such advocacy.

Colleges should be shaping the minds of the next generation, rather than the minds of the next generation shaping colleges. Not only will a market-driven education system casualise the teaching profession, but it will provide ‘snowplough’ colleges that kowtow to the customer, coddle their minds and ask questions about whether the product is meeting the needs of the consumer, rather than whether the student is meeting their responsibilities to themselves (Figure 4).

⁵⁶ Barrett 2018, para. 8.

⁵⁷ Barrett 2018, para. 13.

⁵⁸ Murphy 2017.



Generation Z are broadly aged 5 - 19 years and are characterized by an over-reliance on technology and 24/7 access to information; have trouble distinguishing fact from fiction; have a tendency to think in a non-linear fashion, and are more risk-averse than previous generations. They are also quite entrepreneurial and have confidence in their ability to change the world, but believe that their

college degree is necessary in order to achieve career goals. These are our next generation of students entering higher education. Do we understand them? Are we ready for them? What changes will they bring?

Figure 4: Excerpt from promotional material for an education conference.

Jordan Peterson receives a lot of criticism for his focus on (what is interpreted as right wing) personal responsibility and competence. You are your own best tool for crafting the change you want to see in the world. His message is that you need to work on yourself first. It is commensurate with the factors in Figure 3. The idea of putting the horse back before the cart (i.e. truth or competence back before activism) should not be a controversial one, and we find such a sentiment in Zizek's critique of the Left.

I even provoked some of the leftist friends when I told them that if the famous Marxist formula was, "Philosophers have only interpreted the world; the time is to change it" ...that maybe today we should say, "In the twentieth century, we maybe tried to change the world too quickly. The time is to interpret it again, to start thinking."⁵⁹

Thought before action should move us toward a more rational and engaging Left. And we should embrace a diversity of thought on the Left while maintaining principles of equality of opportunity and the common good. The documentarian Adam Curtis criticises the individualist approach of the counter-culture that came out of the New Left following the civil rights movement, where common good was lost to self-expression.

[Y]ou were encouraged to be authentic by responding to yourself...It was just 'I want to do what I want to be'...[and it said] 'you're never going to tackle the Man, the power. You haven't got the power to do it. The way to do it is to change yourself'...The argument shifted away from the idea of saying 'we can work together to change the world' to saying 'no, if we can actually be the vanguard of changing ourselves as people then you change society like that'. [But] the idea that you are actually changing society as a by-product began to disappear.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, Peterson's message also downplays the 'working together' part, but his idea of self-improvement is in the service of something greater. However, self-improvement can sometimes be self-serving and surface deep. Likewise, concerns for diversity can sometimes skim across the surface and lack depth.

Diversity and Identity politics

After highlighting the need for markers of pathology on the Left, Peterson did suggest his own candidates – what he calls the triumvirate of equality, diversity and inclusion. Equality has been touched on above, but I will briefly comment on diversity and diversity-enhancing initiatives. While viewpoint diversity (deep-level diversity) cultivates an environment conducive to generating and evaluating ideas, diversity of identity focuses on surface-level representation (stakeholder model). A pathological focus on diversity perpetuates the myth that to be inspired, encouraged or validated, or to aspire to achieve in any given domain, requires a

⁵⁹ Zizek 2012.

⁶⁰ Curtis 2017.

role model that shares surface features with you – that represents you because they look like you.

For example, why should women be represented in politics, in STEM fields or at Google? – asked as a Socratic question. To assume it is to bring a ‘woman’s perspective’ to the roles is to exaggerate gender differences (alpha bias – Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988) to a level beyond a fireable offence at Google. Surface-level diversity would be a lazy proxy for deep-level diversity. The intra-gender differences in viewpoint are likely larger than the inter-gender differences. For example, who in Figure 5 best represents a ‘woman’s perspective’?



Figure 5: Mother Teresa, Margaret Thatcher and Michelle Obama. Images from Wikipedia.org

Is gender representation important to have female voices recognised? Which female voices? No group of women can speak for *all* women. And propagating the idea that there is a homogenous, like-minded category ‘women’ which *you* can represent by virtue of you having the attribute ‘woman’, can lead to ridiculous and dangerous misogynistic ideas and a paranoid conspiratorial ‘women vs. men’ tribalism (e.g. Men’s Rights Activists, Men Going Their Own Way, Incels). The idea that to draw an individual or a group of representatives from the category ‘women’ will inevitably lead to a different perspective from members drawn from a category ‘men’ is to apply population-level differences (in this case gender differences) to assumptions made at the level of the individual (the definition of sexism). Undermining or underappreciating variability within a group (clustering illusion) can lead to a false-consensus effect (another cognitive bias) for both in-group and out-group members.

Instead, the affirmative action rationale for gender diversity quotas is to address historical inequalities in opportunity and to show young girls that they can aspire to that type of position or profession, that they are not limited by gender. Post hoc, ergo propter hoc where there is low (or no) representation, limits based on gender must exist (systemic sexism). However, the focus on the gender identity may magnify sensitivity over what is appropriate or not appropriate, achievable or not achievable, for a particular gender. The same could be argued for fascination with racial identities (or any surface-level demographic) and the insistence that you can only relate to or be inspired by someone who looks like you. The conservative talk show host Larry Elder emphasised this point, on ‘articulating the possible’ based on what you do, not what you look like.

Jubilant black parents on the front pages of newspapers, the day after Barack Obama won the presidency in 2008, said things like, “for the first time” they could “sincerely” say to their children that a black person could realistically aspire to become president of the United States.

...I write: "Mom made me feel like I could spit lightening and make bullets bounce off my chest. She sat me down on the front porch when I was about 6 years old. She had an illustrated book of all the presidents from George Washington to Dwight Eisenhower. We talked about their achievements and disappointments."

"'Larry,' she said, tapping the book, 'if you work hard enough and want it bad enough, someday you can be in this book.'"

My parents told us that no one can make you feel inferior without your permission.⁶¹

In a 2005 interview for *60 Minutes*, Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman suggested the way to get rid of racism was to 'stop talking about it'. Far from suggesting we ignore prejudice, inequality or inhumanity, he is suggesting we reduce our fascination with identity, categories and differences. Freeman refers to himself as an American, echoing President Roosevelt's criticism in 1915 of the hyphenated American. The divisiveness of identity politics is explored in a recent book *Political Tribes*; an extract from the book was published in *The Guardian*.

Fifty years ago, the rhetoric of pro-civil rights, Great Society liberals was, in its dominant voices, expressly group transcending, framed in the language of national unity and equal opportunity...Although inclusivity is presumably still the ultimate goal, the contemporary Left is pointedly exclusionary.⁶²

Treating people as humans (or individuals) that simply aspire to do what other humans (or individuals) are doing or have done would leave no need for quotas. Representation is necessary (and I believe it is) because we have made it necessary through our failure to relate to one another as human beings and our failure to recognise and prize our common humanity. Failure to the point where young girls and boys cannot (or worse, must not) be inspired or represented by strong / caring / competent / successful / professional men and women respectively. Historical (and continuing) underrepresentation needs to be addressed for that reason. Cementing surface-level identity into one's self concept, creating an 'entity theory' of one's abilities and aspirations, may be harmful in ways similar to a fixed mind-set.⁶³

Psychologist Seymour Epstein (1973) notes: "the self-concept is a self-theory. It is a theory that the individual has unwittingly constructed about himself as an experiencing, functioning individual and it is part of a broader theory which he holds with respect to his entire range of significant experience" (Epstein, 1973, p.407). What is being continually covered over or obscured by this repetitive and habituated investiture with the conceptualised entity is the natural state of Presence and this results in the exclusivity towards or with the image, producing the sense that the psychological self is exclusively real. This creates something of an inversion, since the object or conceptualised self-regards Presence as a feature of itself (e.g. "my life" or "my consciousness"). This crucible of psychological division perpetuates itself in the collective in the form of adding "versus" to any number of group identifications. It is the nature of conceptualised identities to promote and defend themselves (e.g. communist versus capitalist, republican versus democrat, black versus white, Christian versus Muslim etc.) and while this informs what kinds of ideologies we might identify with or as ("I am a liberal democrat") it continually obscures our commonality or unity at the level of BEING. Freud spoke of the "narcissism of small differences" in referring to how we struggle to promote and defend these ideological positions rather than identifying where we are united in the Real conditions of existence.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Elder 2012.

⁶² Chua 2018.

⁶³ Dweck 2006.

⁶⁴ C. Doherty, personal communication, May 9, 2018.

Like cultural purity, or ideological purity this over-identification with surface-level features reinforces a ‘stay in your lane’ segregationist attitude. I do not adhere to that. It is dehumanising, it is regressive, and it codifies social tensions. The Dalai Lama recently tweeted, ‘I’m Tibetan, I’m Buddhist and I’m the Dalai Lama, but if I emphasize these differences it sets me apart and raises barriers with other people. What we need to do is to pay more attention to the ways in which we are the same as other people’. Through identity politics, well-meaning as interventions may be, the Left could be perpetuating a tribalism that fans the flames of far right hate.

For a kingdom of ends

An unconscionable number of variables compound to make life unfair. Both biology and environment load the dice, and chance rolls our lot. So, what are we to do when faced with that reality? We need to encourage, recognise and reward effort. However, effort is not distributed equally, and we need (re)distributive justice to try our best to equalise opportunity. While you can believe you make your own luck, the institutions of the state can stabilise the hand of luck, and through democratic engagement and civil discourse, the people (universities playing a key role) limit the hand and power of the state. The Left should recognise the liberties and efforts of individuals, the role of circumstance and luck, the levelling effect of social institutions and the need for discourse, civic engagement and the defence of democratic principles.

We know from psychology that personal agency (Rotter) and autonomy (Deci & Ryan) are important; self-efficacy (Bandura) and esteem (Rosenberg) are important. We know the importance of encouraging individuals to prize themselves (Rogers) and strive for significance (Adler, Jung). But we are not isolated minds, crafted completely by our own will. We stand on the shoulders of a social, cultural and intellectual legacy built (continuously) by others and by chance (Kaufman, 2018). We do not stand independently at the end of history, a credit to our own hard work and ingenuity; we stand in history, as part of humanity (embodied and extended cognitively). Vlad Glaveanu’s model of creativity attributes creative success to five factors: actor, action, artefact, audience, affordances. We are but one element. We are not fully self-determined in creating ourselves, our ideas, our successes – it is a sociocultural act.⁶⁵ So to keep inequality in check, to equalise opportunity as much as possible and to recognise the co-creation of individual and group success and the significant role of luck, I identify as Left (of centre). Being on the Left I advocate equal rights, free education, rational regulation, progressive taxation and welfare supports. However, proposals can go too far either way so we need intellectual and public engagement to find what Aristotle called ‘the golden mean’ on these matters. We need a healthy academy and polity, and we need individual and public trust. Elements of conservatism and neoliberalism did an excellent job post-World War II at undermining public trust in state institutions by emphasising our game-playing, self-interest and greed.⁶⁶ Now elements of progressivism and liberalism are doing a good job at further undermining our trust in each other, driving wedges down lines of group identity and reading ill intent and alt-right conspiracy into many attempts for discussion. This cynicism in the possibility that an interlocutor has good intentions (seeking truth, building bridges, improving conditions, etc.), otherwise known as arguing in bad faith, can be seen in recent responses to an article by Bari Weiss (2018) on the ‘intellectual dark web (IDW)’. The name is a poor collective term that loosely links ‘free thinkers’ into a movement, but such a ‘coalition’ is not new (see Continetti, 2018). In critiquing Weiss’s supportive article, *Vox*’s Henry Farrell implies these people are acting on a white male ‘status threat’. Because the people profiled by Weiss

⁶⁵ Glaveanu 2015.

⁶⁶ Adam Curtis covers this assault on society in his excellent documentary *The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom* (2007).

are mostly white males, the IDW is interpreted by Farrell as exclusionary and misogynistic – though there are prominent female intellectuals and online personalities promoting liberal values too. Although membership (technically, there is no movement or membership) is voluntary through simple adherence to and advocacy for liberal values, it is interpreted unfairly through an identity lens to arrive at the portrayal in *Vox* – that these ideas *can only* be held by white males. The value of ideas judged by the colour and gender of those who espouse them. ‘Dark web intellectuals too have seen their culture invaded by women and minorities’.⁶⁷ Their ‘culture’ is not *their* culture. Nor is it based on gender or race; it is a liberal intellectual space for the free exchange of ideas, owned and policed by no one and everyone. You cannot ‘invade’ it, least of all with the colour of your skin or the genitals you possess. Advocating for liberal values over illiberal values (a just hierarchy) is likened by Farrell to hierarchies based on immutable characteristics (unjust hierarchy), and so the lines are blurred and the slur is complete. A similarly unkind reading appeared in *The Guardian*.⁶⁸ ‘True diversity requires generosity of spirit’.⁶⁹ Where the Right erect and police physical borders, the Left increasingly seem to demarcate intellectual space and pillory who they consider ideological others.⁷⁰

Long before Jordan Peterson highlighted the need for us to dissociate good or reasonable ideas from bad, specifically on the Left, I’ve been considering the growing fragmentation of the Left and the need for a re-engagement with that which unifies us, not just on the Left, but all of us. A search for the common ground we might share in terms of ends, rather than means to those ends, was sought in research by Kidder in 1994 through an analysis of interviews conducted over a number of years with two dozen diverse individuals of conscience from 16 nations. The shared values articulated were love and compassion, truthfulness, fairness, freedom, unity, tolerance, responsibility and respect for life. These are not Left or Right values, white or black values, male or female values; these are ‘universal human values’. Other values that featured highly across the interviews are also worth reflecting on: courage, wisdom, hospitality, peace, racial harmony, gender equality, cultural appreciation, environmentalism.

So what good is this code of values? It gives us a foundation for building goals, plans, and tactics, where things really happen and the world really changes. It unifies us, giving us a home territory of consensus and agreement. And it gives us a way—not the way, but a way—to reply when we’re asked, “Whose values will you teach?” Answering this last question, as we tumble into the twenty-first century with the twentieth’s sense of ethics, may be one of the most valuable mental activities of our time.⁷¹

As politics moves from a class of social and economic issues (e.g. poverty and privilege) to a class of identity issues (black poverty and white privilege), deep consideration of our similarities and differences is necessary if we are to find a way forward. Kaczynski believed revolution was easier than reform. He murdered people for his revolution. I would prefer a reformist Left, reclaimed from the extremists, to a murderous, revolutionary one. I hope you would too.

Summary and conclusion

This attempt to identify markers of pathology on the Left resulted in four phenomena, each of which could be explored in far more detail qualitatively, and all would need to be further

⁶⁷ Farrell 2018, para. 26.

⁶⁸ No byline 2018.

⁶⁹ Haidt 2015.

⁷⁰ Horton 2018.

⁷¹ Kidder 1994, 8.

investigated or verified experimentally. The markers are not indicators of the Left but warning signals for where ideas or actors on the Left go too far.

1. **Equality as equity.** Failure to acknowledge individual differences, and distinguish and defend just proportional equality (legitimate hierarchy) from unjust proportional equality (illegitimate hierarchy). One can debate legitimacy, but to deny the existence of any legitimate hierarchy is to make a value statement which you think is more correct than other statements (which is to say it is hierarchical). These positions invalidate themselves, like arguing against reason, or putting forward the idea that ideas do not matter. Or that equality is best achieved through treating people unequally.
2. **Belief in cultural purity and segregation.** Arguing for hierarchies of culture is dangerous when the Right do it, and dangerous when the Left do it. The ideas that an ethnicity owns a culture or that a culture owns a value are dangerous. We live in a multicultural world; pride in an inherited ethnicity, nation or culture (by accident of birth) underestimates the number of contributing factors outside your control (as the Right does with success and failure).
3. **The abandonment of free speech principles.**
 - a. Refusal to engage in discussion with impure people or ideas
 - b. Protection and sanitisation of the minds of others

These principles allow us to divine the truth through articulation of thoughts and engagement with ideological others. Restricting speech (and consequently thought) may result in a forbidden fruit/psychological reactance effect. Infantilising the minds of other adults is an abuse, and idea suppression may lead to a dangerous festering that when eventually exposed can no longer be resolved with dialogue.

4. **Divisive, exclusionary identity politics.** Population-level aggregate data can be very useful in understanding group differences, but to apply this data onto an individual member of a group with no consideration of the multivariate contributions to their situation is wrong. Operating at the level of the individual or emphasising our shared humanity should result in a less polarised politics.

People are entitled to hold these views and debate them (it is most important that they debate them), but I would encourage liberals on the Left to counter these arguments with reminders of care, community, competence, compromise and compassion. For many, a vocal minority has come to represent the Left aided by the magnification of the internet. Often singular instances of stupidity and the worst of ideas get portrayed as having broad support by the media. Right wing media in particular hold the vocal minority up as representatives of the Left when they are nothing of the sort. Liberal values, putting forward an argument, and encouraging civil discussion, can, in part, wrestle the Left back to a coherent set of principles with which it can provide constructive, progressive and realistic opposition to the Right.

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